

1698  
IV  
Confiderations Concerning the *African-Companies*

**T**H E *African* Company have Petition'd the House of Commons, to have their Monopoly confirm'd by Act of Parliament: or in their own words, that a Bill may be brought in, to settle that Trade according to their Charter. Concerning which Petition, and that whole Matter, these things (in behalf of the People of *England*;) are Humbly offer'd to Consideration.

I. That all English Subjects have Right and Liberty to Trade to *Africa*, unless prohibited by Parliament.

II. That of this Liberty they have been deprived, and from this Trade they have been forcibly excluded, without Authority of Parliament, for many Years. And on the account of Trading thither, they have been persecuted and tormented with all Violence and Cruelty. Many have been robb'd of their Ships and Goods, divers have been imprisoned, and some have lost their Lives.

III. These things have been done by the *African* Company; by colour of an illegal Patent, which they call their Charter. Which Company have carried on their Oppressions, with a high Hand, and in contempt and defiance of the Law.

IV. If their Patent were legal, they would have no need of an Act of Parliament; for none would oppose a legal Patent.

V. The ingrossing the *African* Trade by these Men, with the Exclusion of all others, is a perfect Monopoly to all intents; and hath all the pernicious Effects of a Monopoly. Having been the ruin of Thousands, with infinite Damage to the whole Kingdom. And two sorts of People (but in whom the whole Kingdom is concerned) have suffered by this Monopoly in a more especial manner; namely, the Woollen Manufacturers and the Plantations.

VI. They have the sole Selling and sole Buying of all that comes from, or goes to the Countries within their Patent, which contain a Sea-Coast of six or seven thousand Miles. All that buy of them, must give what they please to demand, and all that sell to them, must take what they please to give.

VII. It must be confest, that these Gentlemen of the Company, are grown more reasonable then they have been formerly. For as for the very remote Countries toward the Cape of Good Hope (which have neither Gold, nor good Negroes, nor any that is good;) they are now content, for quietness sake, that the People of *England* be permitted to Trade to them. But the Trade to the Gold Coast, and other good Places, they think is too dainty a Morfel for such Cattel, and is fit for none but Projectors.

VIII. My Lord *Coke* tell us, that all Monopolies have specious pretences of the Publick Good. And so has this. But it can be plainly made out, that their pretences are false and frivolous. Whereas the reason must be very strong, and the matters very well proved and very evident, that shall induce a House of Commons to set up a Monopoly; and to prejudice the whole People of *England* whom they Represent, in favour and for the advantage of a few Men.

IX. The *African* Company, during the late Reigns, was above the Law. But now the Law hath broke in upon them; and they have been Sued, and have paid great Damages, for Wrongs done by colour of their Patent. Nor dare they now commit the like Outrages; nor use their Fellow Subjects as Enemies, if they find them in the *African* Trade. So that their excluding Power being gone, their Monopoly must sink and perish. For the excluding Power is the life of Monopoly. Wherefore in this desperate Case, they use a desperate Remedy, and flie to the Parliament for help.

X. This is the first Monopoly, that ever was brought to a Parliament to be confirm'd. Parliaments do not use to confirm or countenance illegal Projects, but rather to punish the Projectors. But these Men have gone so long without Punishment, that now they pretend to favours.

XI. These men have exercised an illegal Authority for Thirty Years, and now they would have it made legal. If an Act of Parliament be necessary now, it was necessary Thirty Years ago; and why did not they get one then? Either they despair'd to get it, or they scorn'd to take it.

XII. The *Turkey* Trade is properly carried on by a regulated Company, without a Joint-stock or Forts. And nothing hinders but that the *African* Trade might be carried on in like manner. Nay we Trade safely even with the Pirates of *Algier*, *Tripoli*, and *Tunis*, who are the worst of Infidels. There is no Nation so Wicked, so Wild, and Barbarous; but that they will well-come and protect fair *Traders* that come to them; it being for their own benefit.

XIII. But if Forts be found or thought necessary, they may be maintain'd without the odious Expedient of a Monopoly. For a regulated Company may easily maintain them, by impositions upon Ships and Goods.

XIV. The *East-India* Company hath some probable Grounds both, but for the Legality and for the Necessity of it. But this *African* Company hath none.

XV. Were the Trade to *Africa* laid open, and Ships permitted to go, we should certainly furnish the *Spaniards* with Negroes for ready Money. Whereby both Nations would reap great advantage; the *Spaniards* by having the Negroes, and the People of *England* by having the Money.

Suppose some Men should get a Patent to inclose a Common: which accordingly they do inclose, and hold it many years by strong hand. But at last the Law breaks in upon them, and they can hold it no longer. Would a Parliament now confirm those Men in their Usurpation, if they should have the confidence to ask it? Yet perhaps they might say, that they have been at great charge in improving the Land, and preserving it from Inundations, and likewise in Building upon it (all which things are for the Publick Good;) and that they shall be great Sufferers, if their Inclosure be thrown down. And perhaps they might offer, (as the *African* Company does now;) that the Commoners, since they are so troublesome, shall have some Out-Skirt of the Land that's good for little, they keeping the best and greatest part themselves. Let not this Supposition seem forrain or impertinent, for it comes near the present Case. 'Tis the same thing to ingross the Trade, as to inclose a Common.